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AD-A206 504

RT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION unclassified			1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS			
2a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE MAR 27 1989			3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT approved for public release and sale; distribution unlimited			
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) Technical report No. 7			5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)			
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION MIT		6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION ONR			
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Department of Chemical Engineering Cambridge, MA 02139			7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) 800 N. Quincy St. Arlington, VA 22217-5000			
8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION ONR		8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER N00014-87-K-0517			
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) 800 N. Quincy St. Arlington, VA 22217-5000			10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS			
			PROGRAM ELEMENT NO	PROJECT NO.	TASK NO	
					WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO	
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) Path Dependent Morphologies of a Diblock Copolymer of Polystyrene/Hydrogenated Polybutadiene						
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) R.E.Cohen, P.-L.Cheng, K.Douzinis, P.Kofinas and C.V.Berney						
13a. TYPE OF REPORT Technical Report		13b. TIME COVERED FROM TO		14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) March 15, 1989		
15. PAGE COUNT 15						
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION						
17. COSATI CODES			18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)			
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP	Block copolymers			
			Semicrystalline polymers			
			Polymer morphology			
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) Variations in solvent-casting pathways and in bulk annealing conditions led to a variety of morphologies for a single SEB diblock copolymer; some of these are kinetically trapped structures while others are consistent with expectations of equilibrium thermodynamics. Independent control of the morphological scale (microphase-separated vs. disordered) and degree/perfection of crystallinity was demonstrated. These degrees of freedom offer both opportunities and problems for those attempting to develop meaningful structure/processing/properties relationships for semicrystalline block copolymers and for blends in which they are meant to act as emulsifiers.						
20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS			21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION			
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL			22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code)		22c. OFFICE SYMBOL	

OFFICE OF NAVAL RESEARCH
Contract N00014-87-K-0517
R&T Code 4132001---02

TECHNICAL REPORT NO. 7

Path Dependent Morphologies of a Diblock
Copolymer of Polystyrene/Hydrogenated Polybutadiene

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March 15, 1989

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Path Dependent Morphologies of a Diblock
Copolymer of Polystyrene/Hydrogenated Polybutadiene

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INTRODUCTION

For wholly amorphous block copolymers it is known that variations in processing history (temperature, mechanical stress or strain, solvents) can lead to significant and potentially beneficial alterations [1] in the observed morphology of the bulk material, even though a specific equilibrium morphology is anticipated from thermodynamic arguments [2]. In the present paper, we explore this concept for diblock copolymers which contain one block which is crystallizable; the particular crystallizable block considered here is the polyethylene-co-butylene product obtained by saturating polybutadiene of microstructure 45% cis 1,4; 45% trans 1,4; 10% 1,2. The crystallizable diblock, denoted here as SEB, was obtained from a precursor polystyrene/polybutadiene diblock SB for which we have already developed extensive molecular and morphological information [3,4]. In addition to the fact that the SB/SEB pair makes an excellent model system for examining the added effect of crystallinity in block polymers, SEB copolymers have received some attention as potential emulsifying agents [5] in blends of polyethylene and polystyrene.

In this paper, we report on the morphologies we have observed for SEB in bulk following solution casting in two different temperature ranges, below and above the melting point of the EB block. Changes in morphology induced by annealing of the bulk copolymer are also reported. A schematic phase diagram is presented to place the observations in perspective. In addition, we present some information on certain hydrogenation and deuteration reactions on homopolymers to support the assertion that the SEB diblock is the expected analog of SB, i.e., that there is no degradation of the polybutadiene chain length and no hydrogen substitution on the aromatic rings of the styrene repeat units [4].

EXPERIMENTAL

Hydrogenation Chemistry

The catalyst was a triisobutyl aluminum reduced cobalt caprolactam complex. It was prepared under argon according to Halasa's method [6]. One advantage of this catalyst is that it can be extracted into water leaving the final product free of catalyst. Reagent grade caprolactam (m.p. = 67.5°C) was recrystallized in dry ether. The m.p. after recrystallization was 69.5°C. Five mmole of the recrystallized caprolactam were dissolved in about 50ml of sodium-dried toluene; 5/6 mmole of anhydrous cobalt(II) chloride dispersed in toluene were then added to the caprolactam solution, and the resulting solution was heated to 50°C. While heating, the solution became deep blue, indicating formation of the cobalt(II) chloride caprolactam coordination complex. The solution was further heated at 80°C for 15 minutes, cooled to 5°C and then reduced with 5 mmole of triisobutyl aluminum; the deep blue solution changed to a deep brown color.

The hydrogenation reactions were carried out in a 300 ml stainless steel Parr Bench-Top Mini Reactor. A 7 wt% solution of polymer in toluene was added to the reactor. The reactor was evacuated and then the catalyst solution was injected; one half mmole of the catalyst was used per gram of polymer sample. The reaction was carried out under 400 psi hydrogen pressure (Matheson, purity 99.9995%) at 100°C for about 5 hours. After opening the reactor, the hot toluene solution was transferred to a flask which contained about an equal volume of 1M HCl. The two-layer liquid medium was stirred with a magnetic stirring bar at about 65°C. The black organic layer became colorless and the aqueous solution

turned light pink. The organic layer was separated and hot filtered (ca 65°C) through a 0.5 μ m filter into stirred methanol. The polymer was collected from suspension by filtration and then dried in a vacuum oven. The pure hydrogenated polymers were white. Matheson (99.5%) deuterium was used to deuterate the polybutadiene using the same procedures.

Quantitative hydrogenation is achieved under the described reaction conditions. IR spectra were obtained [4] on three samples taken at 0.5, 3, and 5 hours from a hydrogenation reaction of a polybutadiene homopolymer ($M_n=4800$ g/mole). In these IR spectra, the peak at 900 cm^{-1} , which reflects the presence of vinyl unsaturations in the polybutadiene, disappeared completely by 0.5 hr of reaction; the peak at 960 cm^{-1} , which indicates the presence of main chain unsaturations of the 1,4 polybutadiene repeat units, was completely absent in the 5 hr sample whose spectrum was essentially indistinguishable from that of low density polyethylene. Proton NMR experiments [4] also verified that the vinyl unsaturation disappeared more rapidly than the double bond of the 1,4 repeat unit.

The products of deuteration reactions on polybutadiene and polystyrene homopolymers were examined to determine the selectivity of the reaction; we wished to know if any unwanted H-D exchange occurs along the polybutadiene chains along with the saturation of the double bonds; also important for the present work is the need to determine whether there is any significant attack of the aromatic rings of the styrene units. The IR spectrum of a 3 hr deuteration reaction of the polybutadiene revealed a clear peak at 2150 cm^{-1} which represents "C-D" stretching, and a small but discernable peak at 960 cm^{-1} indicating a small amount of double bonds still present in the chain microstructure; at 1300 cm^{-1} a broad -CHD- scissoring band appears while the -CD₂- scissoring band (1046 cm^{-1}) is not present at all in the spectrum. These observations support the contention that there is little or no H/D scrambling with the catalyst system employed here [4,6,7]. The IR spectrum of a 5 hr deuteration reaction on PS showed a weak peak at 2300 cm^{-1} , which may represent aromatic carbons attached to deuterium, while the IR spectrum of a deuterated SB diblock showed essentially no signal at 2300 cm^{-1} [4]. From this we conclude that although some small amount of attack of the aromatic carbons may occur for PS homopolymers, the chemistry described here can be applied to SB block copolymers with no significant contamination of the styrene block.

Finally, we note that whenever air was present in the high pressure reactor, the molecular weight distributions of the products were seriously altered [4]. Careful evacuation of the reactor prior to pressurization with H₂ or D₂ eliminated the oxidative degradation/coupling of the chains. Molecular weights and distributions determined from size exclusion chromatography experiments remained unchanged during the hydrogenation reactions whenever air was rigorously excluded from the reactor.

Molecular Characterization

The molecular characterization of the SB diblock has been described in detail elsewhere [3,4]; molecular weights are 90,000 g/mole and 11,000 g/mole for the polystyrene and polybutadiene moieties, respectively. Based on the above mentioned analysis of the products of control reactions we arrive at molecular weights of 90,000 and 11,400 g/mole for the blocks of the SEB copolymer.

Morphological Characterization

Film specimens of SB and SEB were prepared by solution spin casting from toluene or xylenes according to procedures described elsewhere [4,8]. These films were subjected to various thermal histories in vacuo at 85°C, 105°C, and 140°C. Characterization of the morphologies of these films included differential scanning calorimetry (DSC) on a Perkin Elmer DSC-IV, transmission electron microscopy (TEM) of suitably stained ultramicrotomed (LKB Cryogenic ultratome) sections using a Phillips 300 TEM, and small angle x-ray scattering (Rigaku Cu Rotating anode point source, Charles Supper double mirror focusing optics, Nicolet two-dimensional detector).

RESULTS

Selected results of morphology characterization experiments are given in Figures 1 to 10. For the SB diblock, a spherical microphase-separated morphology is clearly observed in the TEM of osmium tetroxide-stained sections (Figure 1). SAXS spectra showed a large peak at $Q=0.018 \text{ \AA}^{-1}$ indicating a sphere spacing of 350 Å. SANS spectra [4] not shown here could be reasonably well fit with a combination [9] of an intraparticle form factor (sphere radius 95 Å) and a Percus-Yevick interparticle interference function (hard-sphere radius 150 Å). Thermal analysis of SB revealed a polystyrene T_g of near 104°C.

For the case of the SEB diblock cast at 65°C there were no discernible spherical domains in the TEM of ruthenium tetroxide-stained sections of as-cast films and for films annealed at 85°C and at 105°C for 24 hours. Figure 2 shows the type of morphology seen in the TEM for these films. The two-dimensional SAXS patterns for all of these films showed only featureless backgrounds. These disordered morphologies did show evidence of crystallinity, however; DSC traces revealed an endothermic process indicative of crystal melting superimposed on the polystyrene T_g (Figure 3). Wide angle x-ray scattering patterns [4] not shown here revealed 110 and 200 polyethylene reflections.

When the film of SEB cast at 65°C is annealed at 140°C a striking change in morphology is observed. Ruthenium-tetroxide-stained sections now reveal (Figure 4) a microspherical morphology with contrast which is inverted from that of Figure 1. A fit of SANS data [4] on microphase-separated SEB gave the following parameters: sphere radius=145 Å, and hard sphere radius 215 Å. A SAXS pattern (Figure 5) of the high-temperature (140°C) annealed, 65°C cast sample showed a peak corresponding to a value of $Q=0.012 \text{ \AA}^{-1}$ or a sphere spacing of 480 Å. The circular two-dimensional SAXS pattern from which this average radial plot was taken had uniform intensity around the circumference, indicating the absence of alignment or other preferred arrangements of the spherical domains in this sample. DSC traces had the same form as those of the un-annealed sample and the 85°C/105°C annealed samples, but with the important addition of a new peak at $110 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$ (Figure 6); the relative magnitude of this latter peak (compared to the magnitude of the features appearing near 100°C) increased with annealing time when 140°C was employed as the annealing temperature.

Casting at 125°C from xylenes resulted in the direct appearance of the spherical morphology in the as-cast samples (Figure 7). Annealing of these samples at 140°C led to the emergence of the melting transition near 110°C; annealing also has the effect of randomizing the morphology, eliminating the slight tendency for preferred packing arrangements of spheres exhibited by the as-cast films obtained at 125°C from xylenes (Figures 8 and 9).

DISCUSSION

The series of results presented above can be explained in a unified, internally consistent manner by postulating a plausible qualitative form for the temperature-composition phase diagram for the SEB diblock in solvent. In Figure 10 the isothermal solvent casting process is represented by a horizontal arrow which starts at the left of the diagram (our starting concentrations were about 10 wt% copolymer) and proceeds to the right (toward the bulk copolymer) as solvent evaporates. To explain our observations it is necessary that, when the casting temperature is below the melting point of the EB block, crystallization precedes microphase separation; thus at lower temperatures the boundary between the homogeneous solution on the left and the heterogeneous medium on the right represents the point at which the EB crystallizes from solution, carrying the attached S block with it. At still lower amounts of solvent, further to the right in the phase diagram, a second thermodynamic boundary is shown; in region II the diblock molecules would like to self-assemble into the lower free energy state of a microphase-separated morphology. Once crystallized, however, the diblock material is kinetically locked into the morphology formed in region I and it is this morphology which is eventually seen (Figure 2) in the as-cast specimens when 65°C is the temperature of the casting process.

Above the melting point of the EB block, regions I and II merge into a single region III. Crystallization cannot occur and microphase separation occurs directly from solution and persists into the bulk state, as observed in the 125°C casting process.

The results of annealing are also explained by the schematic phase diagram. In the bulk state, the kinetically locked nonequilibrium morphology of Figure 2 will not be released until $T_{\text{anneal}} > T_m$, thereby explaining why the 85°C and 105°C anneals produced no hint of the microspherical morphology. Annealing in the region above T_m releases the constrained molecules and allows them to reorganize into the preferred microspherical morphology. In the region between T_m and T_{ucst} the microspheres are amorphous EB domains; when cooled below T_m these microspheres crystallize giving the microphase-separated semicrystalline morphology shown in Figure 4.

At T_{ucst} the SEB melt changes from heterogeneous to homogeneous, and in principle this homogeneous amorphous state could be kinetically locked into the bulk material by very rapid cooling to room temperature. Based on qualitative considerations of solubility parameters we conclude that T_{ucst} for our SEB diblock must be greater than the value of about 142°C found by Guinlock and Porter [10] for an SBS triblock of lower molecular weight. Thus the position of T_{ucst} is qualitatively correct in Figure 10, lending support to the overall explanation presented here. We have seen a small but reproducible DSC transition near 230°C in experiments on the SEB diblock; we are currently attempting to conduct high temperature small angle x-ray scattering experiments of the type reported by Fishkis and Roe [11] to determine whether this represents T_{ucst} for the SEB diblock.

SUMMARY

Variations in solvent-casting pathways and in bulk annealing conditions led to a variety of morphologies for a single SEB diblock copolymer; some of these are kinetically trapped structures while others are consistent with expectations of equilibrium thermodynamics. Independent control of the

morphological scale (microphase-separated vs. disordered) and degree/perfection of crystallinity was demonstrated. These degrees of freedom offer both opportunities and problems for those attempting to develop meaningful structure/processing/properties relationships for semicrystalline block copolymers and for blends in which they are meant to act as emulsifiers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

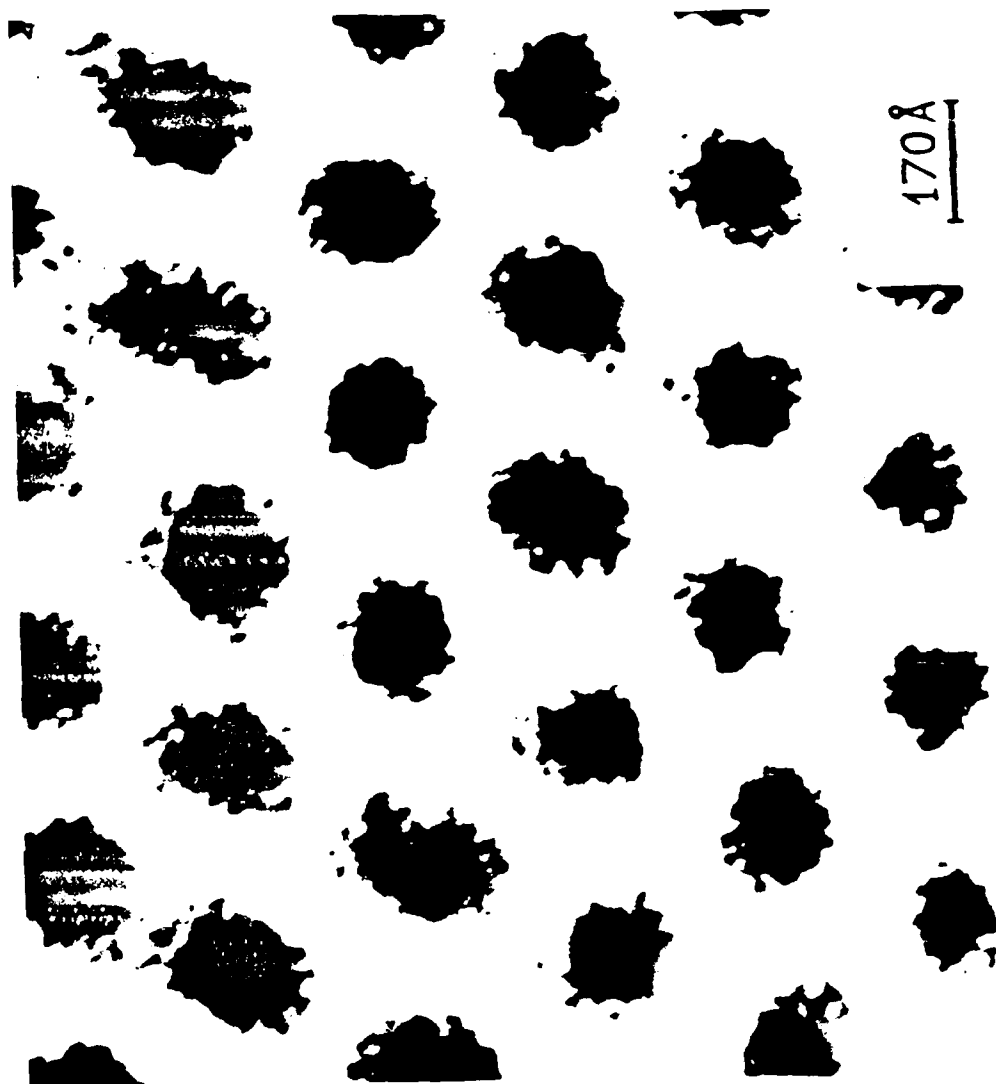
This work was supported in part by the Office of Naval Research. K.D. and R.E.C. acknowledge the financial support of the Bayer Professorship in Chemical Engineering at M.I.T.

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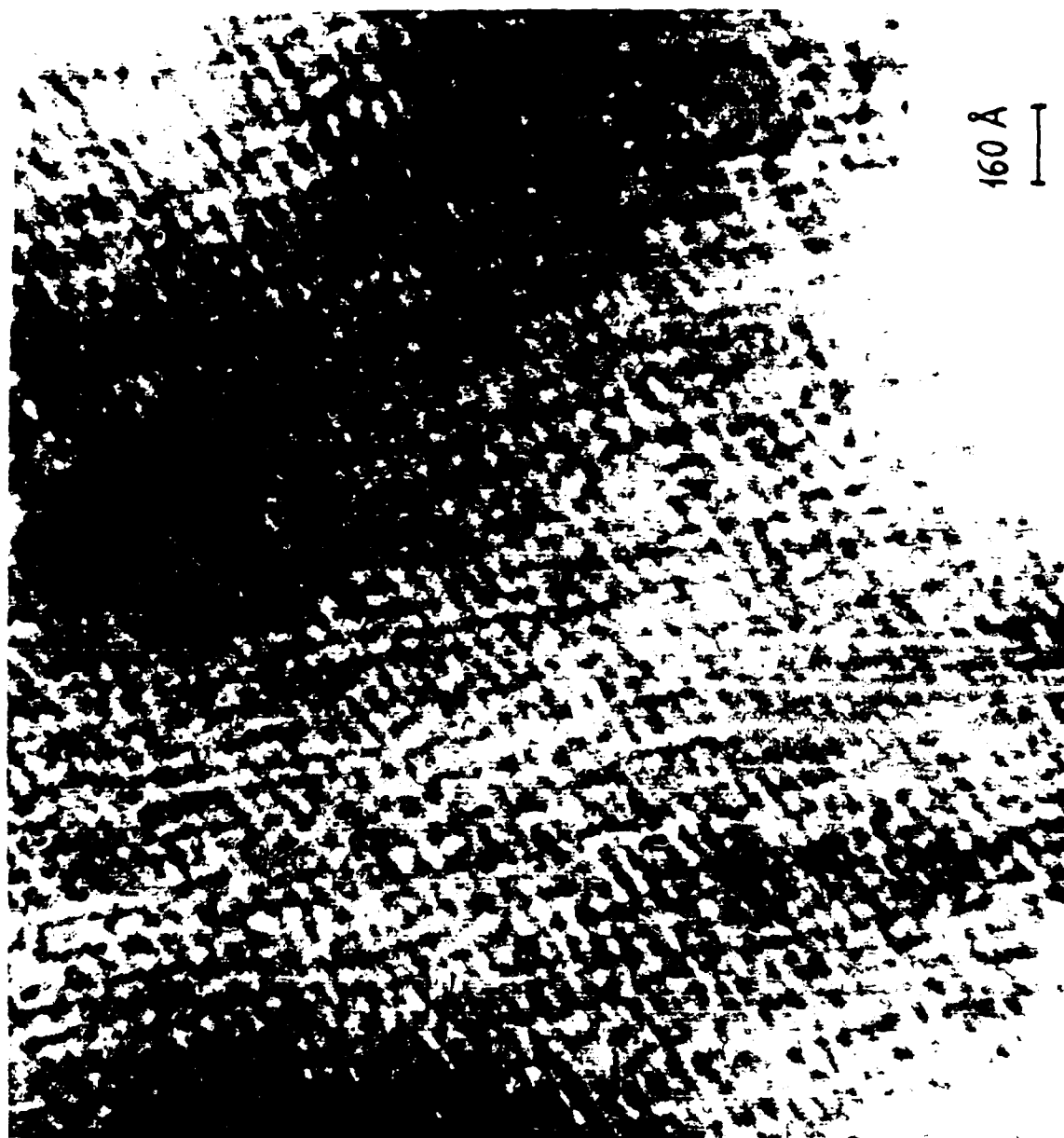
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FIGURES

1. Transmission electron micrograph of osmium tetroxide stained SB.
2. Transmission electron micrograph of ruthenium tetroxide stained SEB cast from toluene at 65°C; essentially identical micrographs are seen for specimens as-cast, annealed at 85°C and annealed at 110°C.
3. Differential scanning calorimetry of SEB cast at 65°C and annealed at 85°C.
4. Transmission electron micrograph of ruthenium tetroxide stained SEB cast at 65°C and annealed at 140°C for 3 hours.
5. SAXS intensity vs. scattering vector for SEB cast at 65°C and annealed at 140°C; morphology is shown in Figure 4.
6. DSC trace for the SEB specimen cast at 65°C and annealed at 140°C.
7. Transmission electron microscopy of the un-annealed SEB specimen as-cast from xylenes at 125°C, stained with ruthenium tetroxide.
8. Two-dimensional SAXS pattern for SEB as-cast from xylenes at 125°C; variation of intensity around the circular pattern suggests some preferred spatial arrangements of the spheres in this un-annealed specimen.
9. Two-dimensional SAXS pattern for SEB cast at 125°C and annealed at 140°C.
10. Qualitative temperature-composition phase diagram for the SEB/solvent system.



170A



160 Å

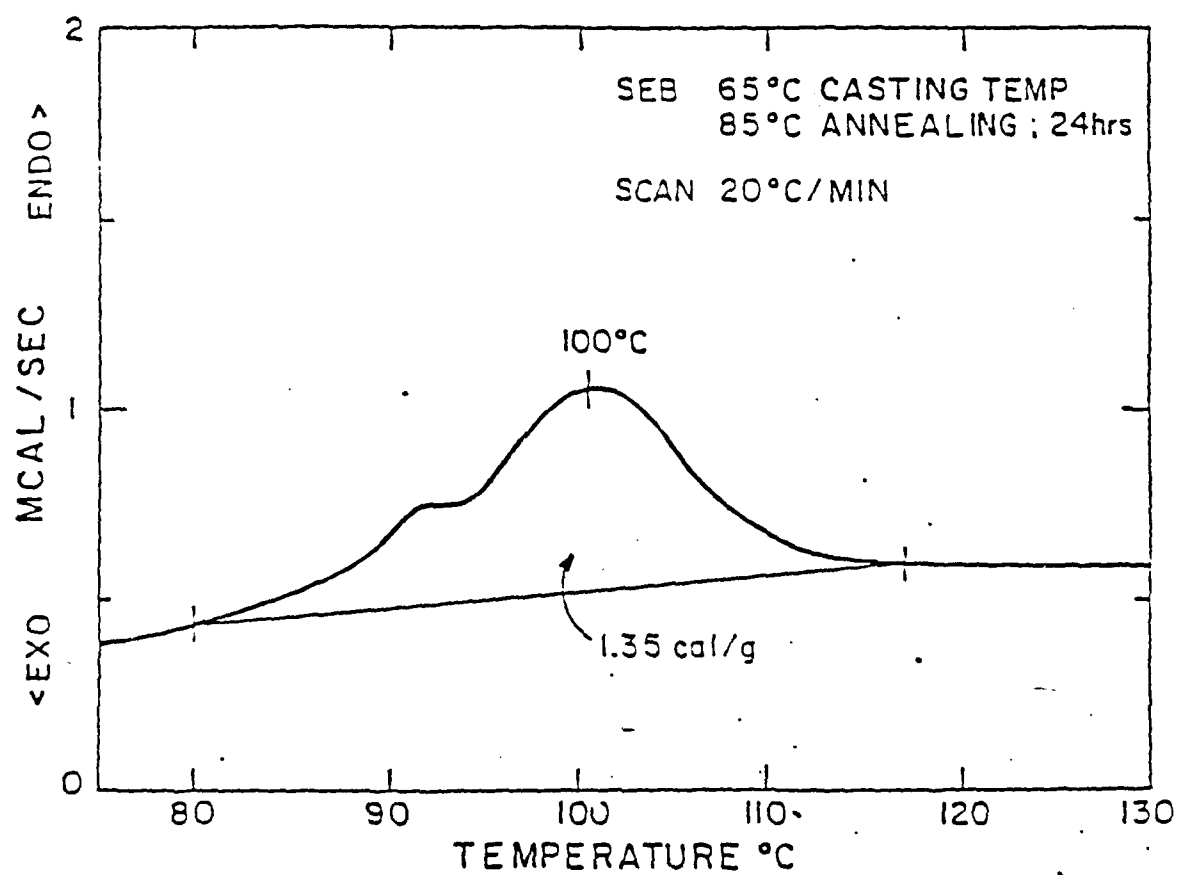
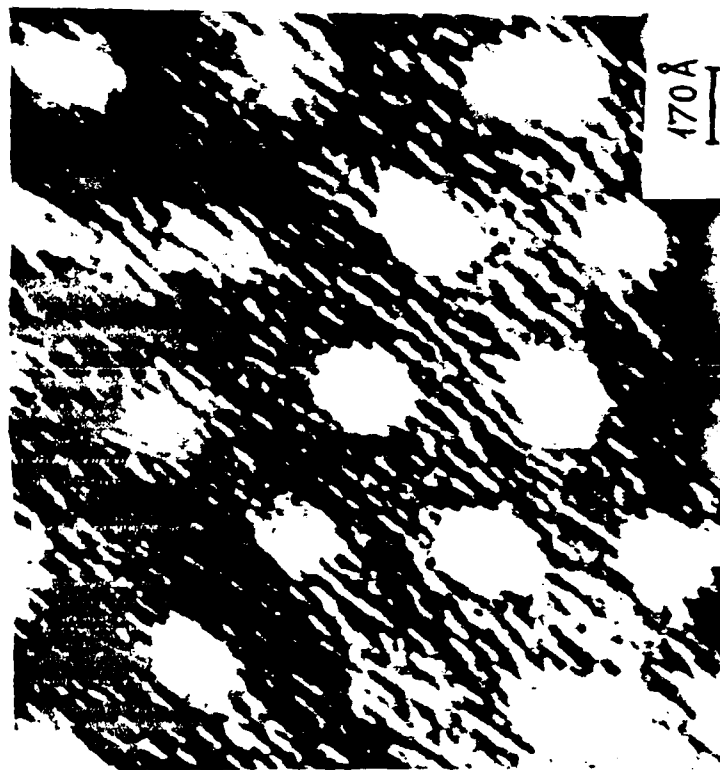


FIGURE 3



SAXS OF SEB/CAST 65°C/ANNEALED 140°C/3h.

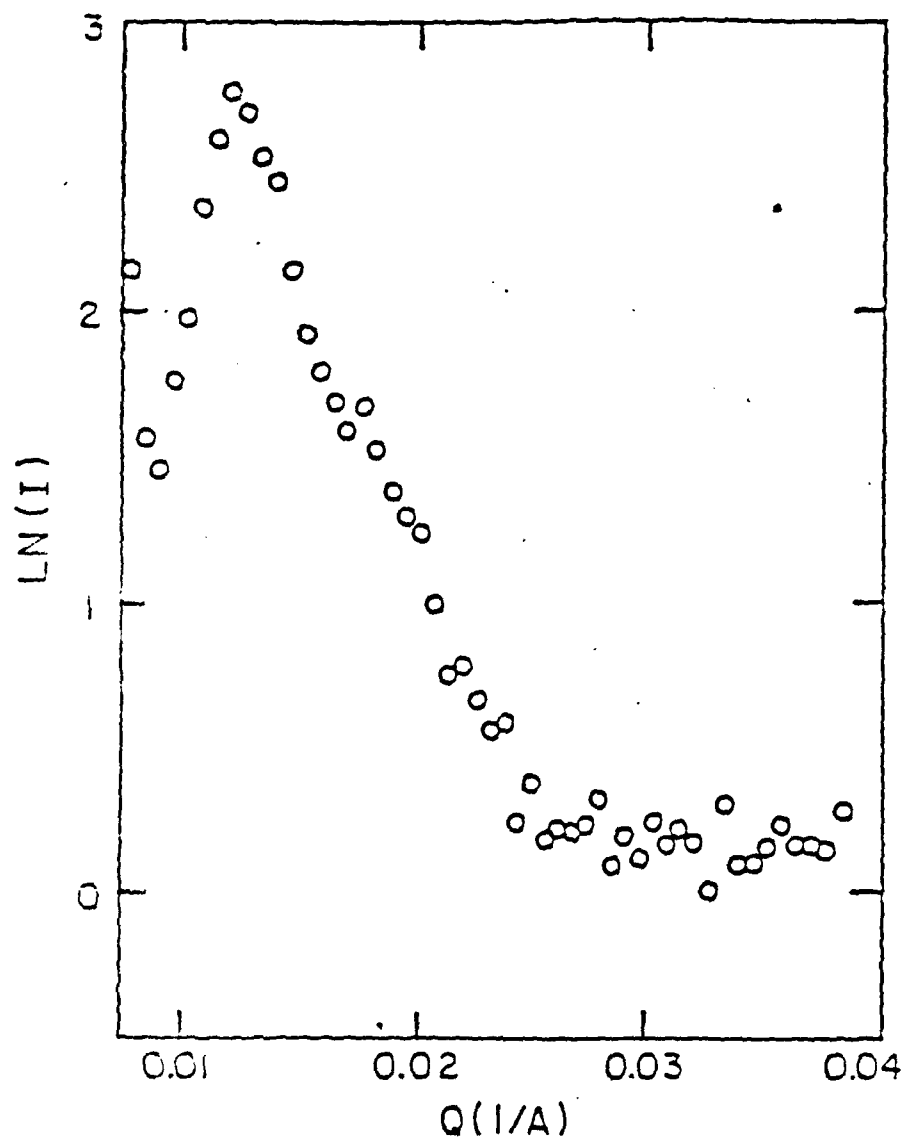


Figure 5

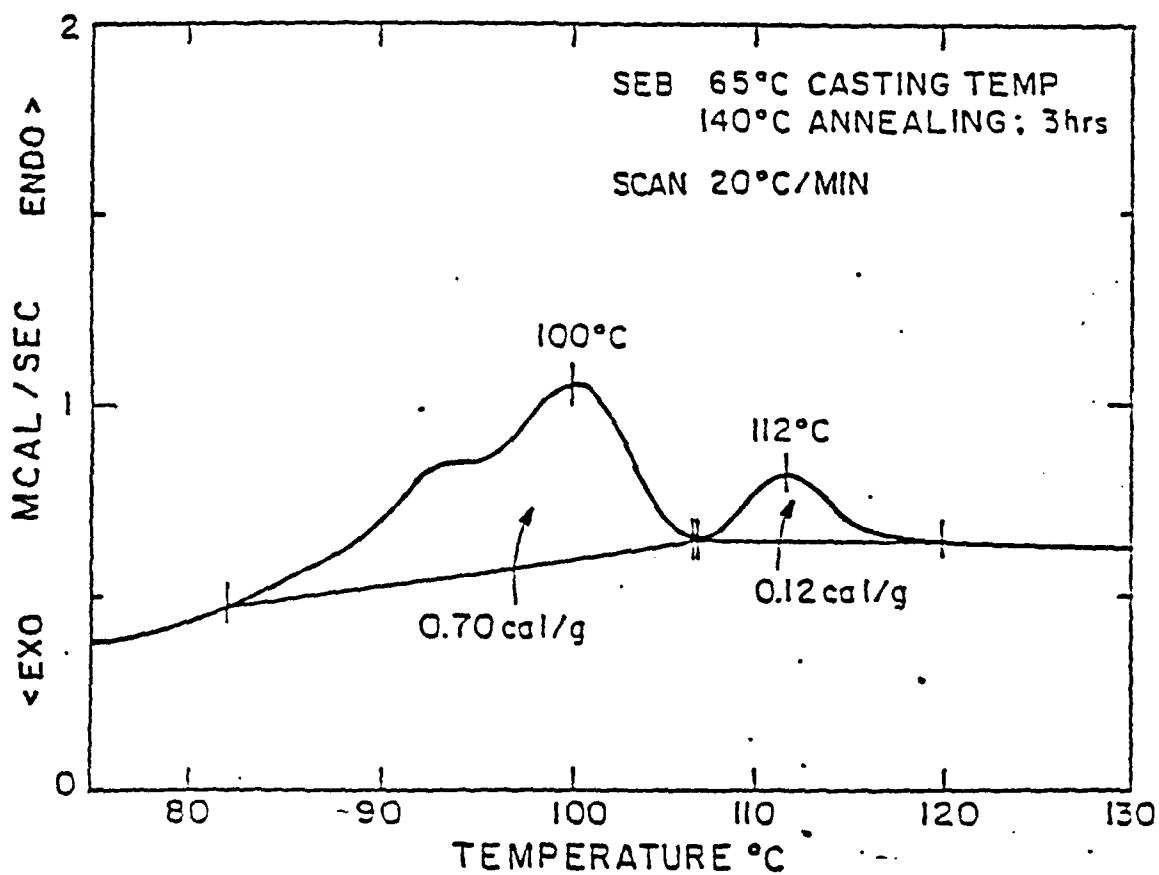
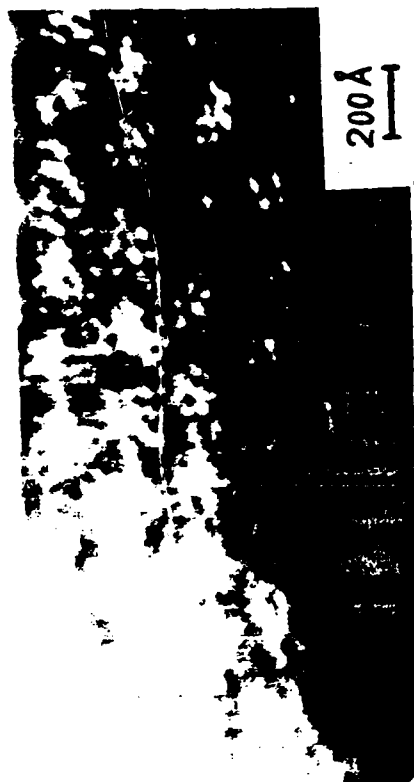


FIGURE 6



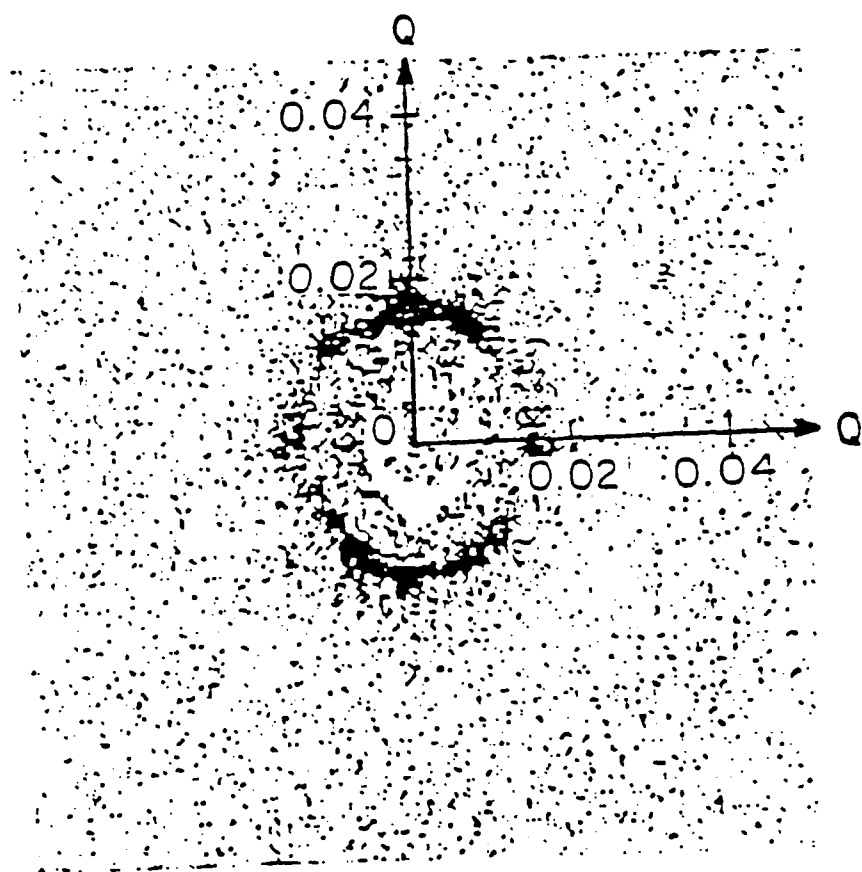


Figure 8

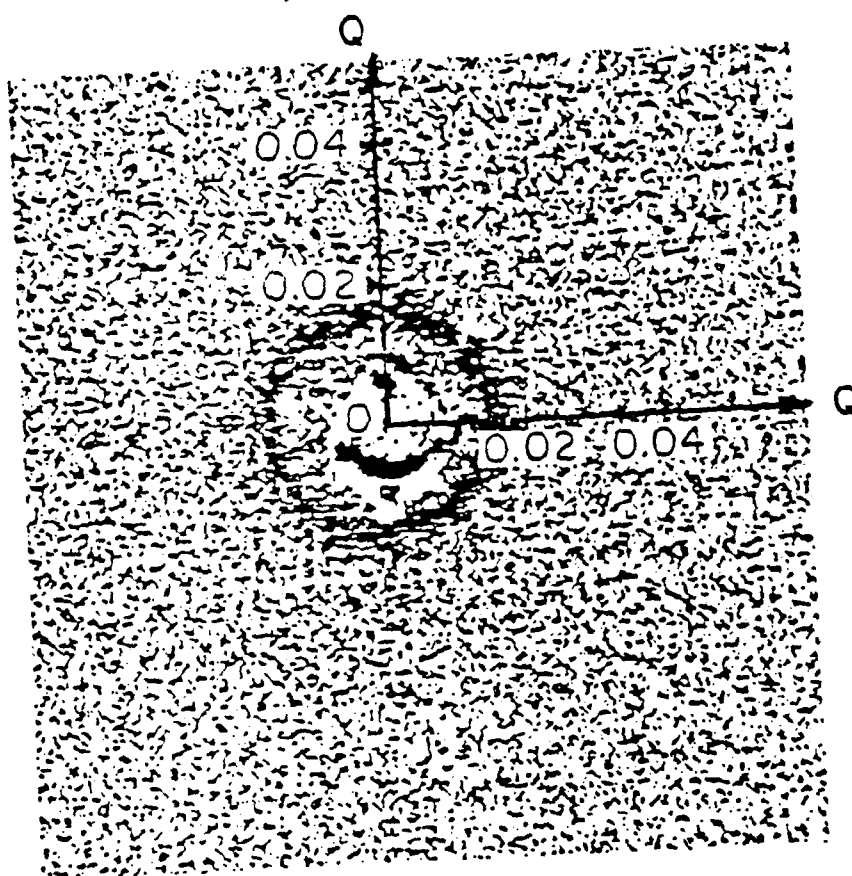


Figure 9

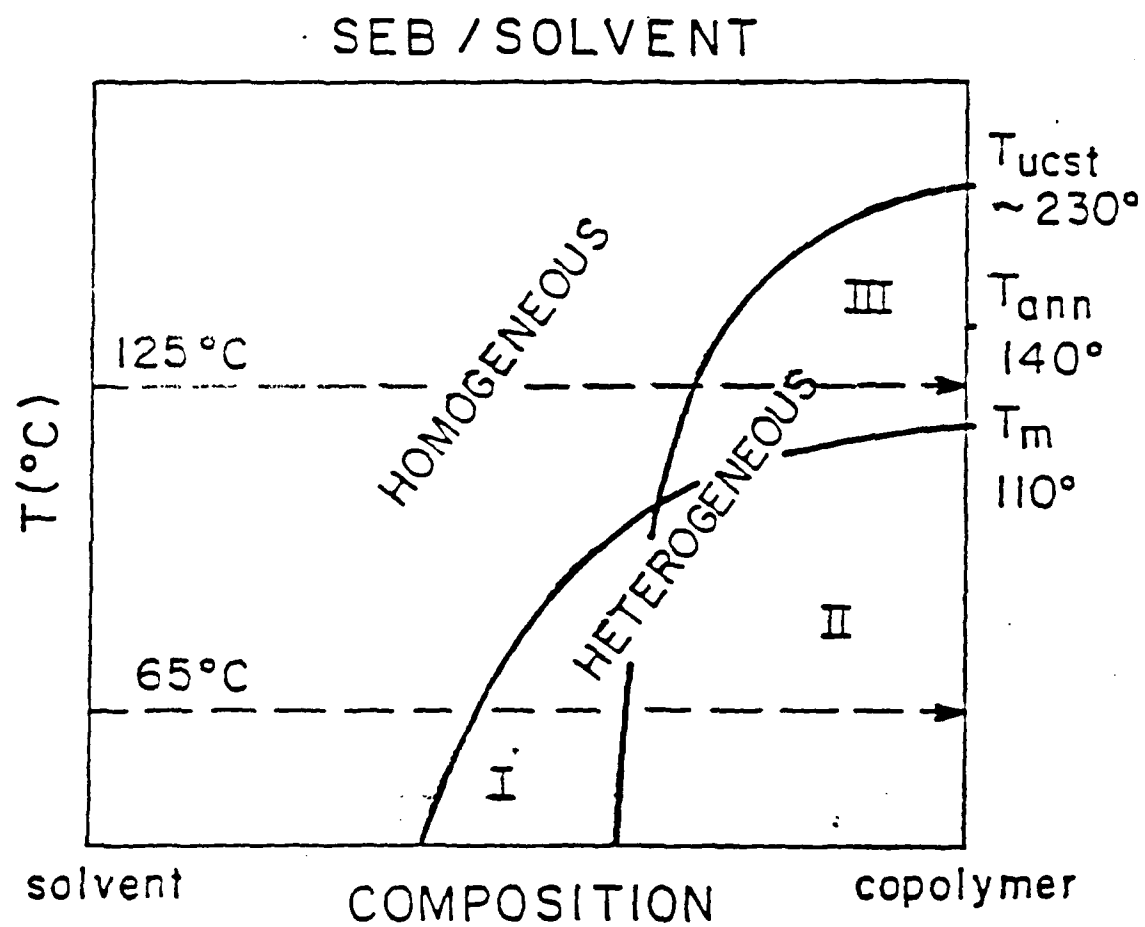


Figure 10